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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of time orientation and preferences of people in western and nonwestern cultures at various life stages. Data were gathered by means of a literature review and a time orientation questionnaire completed by 1,657 individuals in Belgium and Japan. Findings of the study suggest that the time orientation that enhances motivation can vary according to the context. The future orientation is likely to motivate identity development among adolescents who are in the context of attaining independence. The present orientation is likely to be more motivating among middle-aged people. Cross-cultural analysis indicates that western people show future orientation in the context of an individualistic culture that regards the independence and personal competence whereas eastern people show present orientation in the context of a group-oriented culture. In short, adolescents and western people can be considered predominantly future oriented since they are self-centered and want to control and change their situation, while middle-aged and eastern people could be considered predominantly present oriented since they regard harmony with others and acceptance of life situations as more important. (Contains 40 references.) (KC)

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The Meaning of Being Predominantly Present-Oriented in Middle Age and in Non-Western Context

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Introduction

Previous studies have generally mentioned that future can be more important as a cognitive-motivational variable than the present and the past (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986; Nuttin & Lens, 1985; Raynor, 1981; Trommsdorff, 1994). This idea tends to result in a positive perception towards the future orientation and in a negative perception towards the present orientation. I call it as "a future oriented bias" if it always assumes the future orientation positively and the present orientation negatively working in any context in the relation to motivation for behavior and development. A future oriented bias examines a present orientation in only an aspect of hedonistic or fatalistic tendency.

I would like to examine the future oriented bias in terms of the integration of developmental and cross-cultural perspective so as to clarify how effects of time orientations on motivation can vary according to contexts.

Examining life-span developmental studies

A future oriented bias is not always wrong because the findings of empirical studies have supported this idea not only on the topics of achievement motivation (Gjesme, 1979; Raynor & English, 1982; Teahan, 1958) but also on identity development (Tsuzuki, 1993). For example, Tsuzuki (1993) found identity achievement status showed more realistic and planned attitude to the future and related to future orientation than other identity statuses among university students.

However, it is important to note that subjects in these studies are adolescents. It is easy to understand that adolescents orientate towards the future because they transit into the career and/or marriage life. Instead of adolescence, examining middle and old age, can we get same findings as it?

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It is true that, even in old age, a hope and a long distance of future extension show better mental health than lack of them (Lehr, 1967; Kastembaum, 1987). Future time perspective is also important for middle and old age as well as adolescence.

On the other hand, previous studies in life-span developmental perspective can be summarized that adolescence is the predominantly future oriented but middle age is in the transition to the predominantly present oriented in old age (Bortner & Hultsch, 1972; Cameron, 1972; Cameron, Desai, Bahador & Dremel, 1977-78; Hultsch Bortner, 1974; Lomranz, Friedman, Gitter, Shmotkin, Medini, 1985; Nuttin & Grommen, 1975; Shmotkin, 1991).

For middle age, becoming a restricting future extension (Lens, & Gailly , 1980) and changing social role can give a specific feature to their time orientation. Neugarten (1968) indicated "life is constructed in terms of time-left-live rather than time-since-birth. Not only the reversal in directionality but the awareness that time is finite is a particularly conspicuous feature of middle age"(p.97). Ihda & Sato (1988), from their experiences of therapy, suggested that adolescents resolved a conflict by adjusting into social life but a middle aged people could not do without the acceptance of personal limits and death that they were facing. Nurmi, Pulliainen & Salmela-Aro (1992) also described that people came to set more uncontrollable goals and concerns in domains as such health-, self-, offspring, and property-related ones along with age. As the results, middle aged people face to the task of changing time orientation to be suitable for a restricting time perspective and uncontrollable life events. It should be different from the adolescents' future orientation and be possibly one of the present orientation.

Shortly, a future oriented bias may overlook the distinctiveness of present orientation that can be vailable to the middle or old age. Therefore it leads to a question: How can we clarify the distinctiveness of the present orientation in the non-future-oriented context?

Examining cross-cultural studies

Previous cross-cultural studies are summarized that the western culture is likely to orientate towards the future and, in comparison with it, the eastern is likely to orientate towards the present or the past (Kluckhorn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Meade, 1968, 1971; Sundberg, Pool & Tyler, 1983). A future oriented bias perceives the present orientation to be hedonistic or fatalistic and the eastern showing the present orientation cannot be without getting its tendency. Is it really true?

It is true that the future orientation showed higher achievement motivation than the present or past orientation even in the non-western context identified as predominantly present or past oriented (Meade, 1968; Roberts & Greene, 1971; Shannon, 1975).

On the other hand, we should examine if a meaning of time orientation can vary according to socio-cultural contexts (Graves, 1972; Shannon, 1975). Indeed, Raynor (1982) suggested that future orientation might be a western bias since the ability to attain one's future goals was a central part of valued self-image for many in western culture. Therefore it leads to a question: How can we clarify the distinctiveness of the present orientation in non-western cultural context?

The question

I would like to summarize what I have already mentioned and a question.
(1) From the evidences of developmental and cross-cultural studies, it is true that a hope and a long (realistic) distance of extension in future time perspective show more positive attitude towards selves and environment than lack of them. It is likely to be common through age groups and cultural diversity.
(2) However, it may overlook the distinctiveness of likely predominantly present oriented in non-future-oriented context.
(3) The question is "How can we clarify the distinctiveness of the time orientation in non-future-oriented context?" Then, I would like to change it to this question: "How can we measure the time orientation so as to clarify both the commonness and distinctiveness?"

Time Orientation Questionnaire

Time orientation is defined as a rank ordering of the preference in the past, present, or future with a belief system about interrelations between the past, present and future (Shirai, 1996b). It is measured by Time Orientation Questionnaire (TOQ, Shirai, 1996abcd, 1997). Subjects are asked their time orientation with the following open-ended question: "Which is the most important time for you, the future, the present, or the past? Then, please write down why you prefer it."

We classify a preference of the future into "future orientation," a preference of the present into "present orientation," and a preference of the past into "past orientation." Then we examine the reasons of preference in terms of the connection of the present with the future. If they implicate the connection, we label "positive", and, if not, we label "negative." For an example, the description, "I prefer the future since the present is a step to attain the future goals", indicates the connection of the present with the future and it is labelled as "positive". Then it is coded as "Positive Future Orientation (PFO)" since one has preferred the future. For an example of the label "negative" is such a description as "I prefer the future since my present is bitter but my future is unknown." One seems to imagine unrealistic future so as to escape from the bitter present situation and it is labelled as "negative." So, it is coded to "Negative Future Orientation (NFO)."

TOQ codes time orientation by means of the criterion combined by 2 dimensions, namely the most important time and the connection of the present with the future. TOQ classifies time orientation into 5 types: PFO, NFO, Positive Present Orientation (PPO), Negative Present Orientation (NPO), and Past Orientation (PO).

An example of PPO is such case of the description as, "I prefer the present since, if we live with my might now, it leads us to better future." It implicates the future as a consequence of the present effort and it is labelled as "positive." On the other hand, NPO has an example of such description as "I prefer the present since I consider only present pleasure as it is no use to see the future." It looks to be hedonistic or fatalistic and it is labelled as "negative." PO is always grouped into "negative" because regarding the past is supposed to interrupt the immediate connection of the present with the future.

Actual procedure is carried out to classify the answers to TOQ into 22 categories, and then code them into 5 types of time orientation.

We will examine the distribution of types of time orientation by nationality and sex. The proportion of PFO is more in Belgium than in Japan, and that of PPO is more in Japan than in Belgium. NFO is more in Japan than Belgium but it is a slight difference. NPO is also more in Japan than in Belgium but PO is more in Belgium than in Japan. However, these are no statistically significant difference. For these reasons, it can be said that Belgian might orientate towards the future, and Japanese might orientate towards the present.

Content analysis reliability of TOQ, measured by the percentage rate of agreement between the two independent raters excluding the coding of PO because of no label, was 83% (N=1657, Shirai,1996c, 1997). Test-retest reliability, measured 2 weeks later in 75 students, was 80% (Shirai,1996bc, 1997). The validity of this scale has been confirmed by Shirai (1996bc, 1997) that showed the predicted pattern particular to each type of time orientation in the relation with time beliefs and time attitude towards the past, the present and the future.

Distribution of time orientation in life-span development

We firstly examine the percentage of the positive or negative future orientation across age groups in the sample of Japanese. PFO shows the peak in early adulthood and then decreases a little bit along with age. NPO also decrease along with age. Total amount of the future orientation decreases from adolescence and early adulthood to middle and old age. Secondly we examine the percentage of the positive or negative present orientation across age groups. PPO shows the peak in middle age and then decreases but NPO increases sharply in old age. The total amount of the present orientation increases along with age. Thirdly we examine the percentage of the past orientation across age groups. PO decreases a little bit along with age to the bottom in middle age and increases in old age. Therefore it is of note that old age shows more

proportion of PO but does not so much.

Accordingly, the amount of future orientation decreases and that of present orientation increases along with age. It is corresponding with the findings of previous studies. At the same time, we find the features of time orientation in each age group as such: Early adulthood is characterized by more proportion of PFO: Middle age is by that of PPO: and old age is by that of NPO.

Time orientation and identity status

Since middle age is said to face the task of identity achievement as well as adolescnece (Horiuchi, 1993; Okamoto, 1985; Waterman, 1993), I examine the relationships between time orientation and identity status in order to clarify how effects of time orientation on motivation of development can vary according to context related to age.

Identity statuses were classified into 4 statuses: Achievement was the highest status and referred to the commitment on life goals after crisis in which they explored them. Moratorium was the second and referred to the exploration in crisis. Foreclosure was the third and referred to the commitment on them without crisis. Diffusion was the lowest and referred to non-commitment on them.

For adolescents (Age: M=20.0, SD=1.55, Range=18-24) , achievement shows more proportion of PFO than diffusion. Moratorium shows more proportion of PPO than diffusion. Diffusion shows more proportion of NFO and NPO & PO than others. Therefore, achievement associates with PFO and moratorium does with PPO but diffusion does with NFO and NPO & PO in comparison with each type. This result indicates that to get PFO is likely to lead to identity achievement in adolescence.

For middle aged people (49.3, 4.41, 40-63) , achievement shows more proportion of PPO than diffusion but diffusion does more proportion of NPO & PO than achievement. The proportion of PFO is not statistically significantly different from that of NFO. The results indicate that to get PPO is likely to lead to identity achievement in middle age.

Accordingly, the results indicate the followings: (1) The "positive" types of time orientation, which implicate the connection of the present with the future, show more motivation for identity development than the negative types, which lack them; It is found to be common through age groups, and (2), on specifying the types labelled as "positive," the middle age associates identity development with the present orientation while adolescence associates it with the future orientation; The distinctiveness of time orientation particular to each age group is found.

Conclusion

Findings of this study suggest that the time orientation that enhances motivation

can vary according to the context: Developmental study indicates that the future orientation is likely to motivate identity development among adolescents who are in the context of their attaining the independence from their parents and of transition into the social life by themselves. In comparison with adolescence, the present orientation is likely to be more motivating among middle aged people who are in the context with a restricted time perspective and concerns for uncontrollable domains. Cross-cultural study indicates the western people show the future orientation in the context of individualistic culture that regards the independence and personal competence while the eastern people show the present orientation in the context of group-oriented culture that regards interpersonal relationships and self-control.

As a consideration, findings can be examined with respect to the frame work of primary-secondary control (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder, 1982; Trommsdorff,1994) and independent-interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991): If speaking again, adolescents and western people could be predominantly future-oriented since independent self finds meaning by reference to its own internal thoughts, feelings and actions and needs to change the situation; In contrast to it, middle aged people and eastern people could be predominantly present-oriented since they regards more interdependent self which main goal is to harmonize with others and one accepts a situation as it is and learns to live with it.

As a summary to show the effect of time orientation on motivation depending on the context, PFO may be more motivating in the context of independence and controllability but PPO may be more motivating in the context of interdependence and uncontrollability. NFO, NPO and PO are not motivating because of the lack of the connection of the present with the future.

Finally, the findings suggest that previous studies might have mainly committed on the dimension of the connection of the present with the future and dealt with the commonness or universality. For a result, they conclude that the future orientation, which means connectedness-with-future, is mostly important to motivation for behavior and development. However, it fails to deal with the distinctiveness or indigenousness. I would like to suggest to pay an attention also to second dimension, which leads to better understanding of the people in non-future-oriented context.

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